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# **Nordidactica**

## **- Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education**

### **2011:1**

## **Assessing historical empathy through simulation – How do Finnish teacher students achieve contextual historical empathy?**

Jukka Rantala

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*Abstract: There has been a great deal of international debate about introducing historical empathy as the focus in teaching history. However, as it is, the contents of the concept have been included in the curricula in many countries. Nevertheless, practising stepping into the shoes of a person from a previous era is still in its infancy in schools in many locations – Finland included. This article discusses Finnish class teacher students' understanding of historical empathy. The article is based on a study where 360 class teacher students played a game simulating the Cuban Missile Crisis. Their task was to assume the roles of the superpower leaders and make decisions on the basis of these roles. The simulation showed that a majority of the student teachers are able to attain a level of contextual historical empathy. They were able to empathize with the historical context in question and make such decisions that would have been possible for the historical actors. Some of the playing groups on the other hand, referred to their current knowledge and attitudes, which, according to Ashby and Lee's empathy classification, shows lower-level empathy. The study corroborates previous research results concerning great discrepancies in the understanding of empathy prevalent within one age group. Moreover, the study raises the question of how historical empathy should be handled in teaching if many future teachers have difficulties in understanding it.*

**KEYWORDS:** HISTORY TEACHING, HISTORICAL THINKING, CONCEPT OF EMPATHY, ASSESSING EMPATHY, SIMULATIONS

## Introduction

The teaching of history has traditionally been built on the national identity, which is reflected in the teaching of so-called great narratives. The tradition of the teaching of history, as a matter of identity, was strongly encouraged up to the latter half of the 1900s. At that time, demands appeared which began to require a change in history teaching, from identity subject to practical subject which trains critical information processing (VanSledright, 2011, p 16; Phillips, 1998, pp. 17–19; Lévesque, 2008, pp. 18–19). In addition to these two traditions, both history teaching and history didactics have had different emphases. For example, over the last 15 years, the historical consciousness of young people has attracted attention (e.g. Angvik & Borries, 1997). Research related to historical consciousness seeks to understand how young people are able to explain the present with the aid of the past and how they are thus able to gain a safe understanding attitude of the future. In clarifying the historical consciousness of young people, it is essential to know how they understand the intentions of the historical actors. This connects historical empathy to the teaching of historical consciousness.

The fundamental task of history is to explain human actions. In teaching, this aim was implemented for a long time implicitly while discussing the contents of history. However, as the old history teaching tradition was broken in the late-1990s by teaching that emphasised skills, it was placed at the core of teaching. The skills-oriented teaching of history is not merely a subject aimed at identity education but a discipline that increasingly trains pupils in historical thinking. A multi-perspective approach gained increasing ground in the aims of history teaching. The teaching aims to make pupils see events from the perspectives of various participants and to understand why in a certain historical context they acted the way they did. The advent of skills-oriented teaching meant that pupils started to receive teaching in historical empathy.<sup>1</sup>

Creative writing and drama have been utilised in practising historical empathy. However, simulations provide a natural basis for empathy exercises, since they often set out from historically authentic situations and the participants aim to assume a specific role. The risk of simulations is that the players are incapable of adopting the rules required by the simulation, that is to say, the framework of historical events. If the players bring their current knowledge or modern attitudes to the simulations, they are in danger of turning the simulation into a recitation of fairy tales. Consequently, the sense of historical empathy can be thought of as a precondition for successful simulations. The rules of the simulations are usually easily adoptable. On the other hand, deficiencies in historical empathy are more difficult to overcome. Players' current knowledge or attitudes are often clearly evident in discussions and decisions

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<sup>1</sup> On the concept of empathy e.g. Lee, 2002, pp. 26–27; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Shemilt, 1983, p. 3; Foster, 2001; Portal, 1987.



pertaining to the simulation. Therefore, simulations offer an excellent opportunity to study the level of the participants' historical empathy.

The teacher's personal sense of historical empathy is a precondition for teaching the concept in question (Davis Jr., 2001, pp. 9–10; Stover, 2005, p. 207). However, teachers' understanding of historical empathy has not been studied. It is as if research has set out from the assumption that people who teach history are well-versed in the nature of historical knowledge and consequently historical empathy. However, this is not necessarily the case. This article will study the competencies possessed by future teachers to teach historical empathy.

The beginning of the article will discuss the concept of historical empathy and the traditions of teaching it. Following this, the article will turn to use simulations as tools for learning about history and presents the Cuban Missile Crisis simulation used in data collection. The second half of the article will analyse the nature of students' historical empathy on the basis of the data collected during the simulation. Finally, the possibilities of future class teachers reaching a level of contextual historical empathy are discussed.

## **Empathy as a part of historical thinking**

The concept of empathy can be found in documents steering history teaching in many countries. Even though in the last few decades it has taken its place as one of the points of departure for teaching, hardly any other aspect of historical thinking has stirred up as much debate. Some researchers and pedagogues think that the concept in question should be the focus of the teaching because it would help young people explain past human actions. Others have opposed teaching it, claiming historical empathy is a contrived concept.

The concept of historical empathy has been used in a variety of ways. Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby have defined empathy as “the ability to see and entertain as conditionally appropriate, connections between intentions, circumstances, and actions, and to see how any particular perspective would actually have affected actions in particular circumstances.” (Lee & Ashby, 2001, p. 25.) Summing up the definitions of various researchers, empathy can be taken to mean putting oneself in the position of another person in a specific historical context.<sup>2</sup> This perspective taking in history teaching aims to provide pupils with the competence to understand the actions of people in the past. Indeed, many researchers consider empathy as a part of historical thinking (For example, Levstik, 2008, p. 56).

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Kaya Yilmaz (2007) defines empathy as the “ability to see and judge the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions, and actions of historical agents using a variety of historical evidence.” He regards empathy as “the skill to re-enact the thought of a historical agent in one's mind or the ability to view the world as it was seen by the people in the past without imposing today's values on the past.” For their part, Keith Barton and Linda Levstik (2004, p. 222) have emphasised the significance of perceiving the perspective in empathy exercises.

Researchers agree on the significance of an adequate knowledge basis as the foundation of historical empathy (For example, Husbands & Pendry, 2000, p. 131; Davis Jr., 2001, pp. 5–7; Lee & Ashby, 2001, p. 25; Foster, 2001, pp. 172–173.). However, they have varying views on the place of emotions in historical empathy. Some think empathy exercises aim at understanding the effect of certain emotions in people's actions, whereas others argue that it is impossible to identify with emotions.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of empathy is strongly present in the English-speaking research tradition. At times the term is replaced by 'perspective taking' or 'rational understanding'.<sup>4</sup> However, empathy as a term has clearly supplanted, for example, the Collingwoodian 're-enactment' concept.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of empathy was introduced to teaching in the United Kingdom with the advent of the *Schools Council Project* in the 1970s (Boddington, 1980, p. 13), but it seems to have established its position only by the end of the following decade with the launch of the *National Curriculum* (Phillips, 2000, p. 16). The New Right, however, opposed placing empathy at the core of teaching in schools and the concept became a bone of contention in the struggle between two competing traditions of history teaching.<sup>6</sup> It is largely a question of a debate pertaining to emphases put on skills or contents, in which the New Right was concerned about the education of national identity being at risk due to skills-oriented history teaching. It attacked skills-oriented teaching precisely through the concept of empathy and attempted to label the use of the concept as unprofessional (Harris & Foreman-Peck, 2004, p. 98). Even when the struggle was at its most heated and many teachers started to avoid the concept (Phillips, 2002, p. 45), empathy remained at the core of history teaching in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, the debate left its mark on the individuals preparing the documents steering education. Today, the content of the concept can be seen in curricula but the term 'empathy' is not used (Phillips, 2002, pp. 46–47). Likewise,

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<sup>3</sup> According to Vivienne Little (1983), in addition to rational thought, feelings also guide human actions. Consequently, she argues that feelings are therefore an essential part of the concept of empathy. The significance of emotions is not questioned but identifying with feelings is frequently thought of as impossible. An example of this is the comment made by a WWI veteran about the reality TV series *The Trench*, which simulated the war, that persons participating in the series could not have completely assumed the place of real soldiers because they lacked the fear of death which was very real for those in the war. Moreover, it is impossible to identify with the feelings of uncertainty and fear of a family waiting for letters on the home front. According to Van Emden (2002, p. 4), Bell (2009), Lee and Ashby (2001, p. 24) and Foster (2001, pp. 169–170), feelings do not belong within the sphere of empathy. Barton and Levstik (2004, p. 207) and Davis Jr. (2001, p. 3) do consider feelings as a part of empathy. See also VanSledright, 2001, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> However, Barton (1996), Downey (1995), Barton & Levstik (2004, p. 207), Lee and Ashby (2001, p. 21) consider the above-mentioned concepts as more problematic than empathy.

<sup>5</sup> On Collingwood's 're-enactment' concept and its criticism, see Dray 1999, e.g. pp. 32, 38–52. Vanessa Agnew (2007, pp. 299–300) claims that the concept has re-entered the speech of historians but it has remained absent from the debate related to history teaching. On the current usage of the concept of re-enactment see Agnew 2004.

<sup>6</sup> On the criticism towards empathy in the United Kingdom, see Phillips (1998; 2002, pp. 19, 45–47), Knight (1987). According to Husbands, Kitson and Pendry (2003), conservative philosophers of history have since the 1960s expressed doubts about including the concept of empathy as a part of history teaching.

empathy is part of the *National Standards* in the United States in the guise of ‘perspective taking’.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding of empathy has been studied mostly by researchers in English-speaking countries. Researchers who have created various empathy models and classifications on the basis of their studies include Stuart J. Foster, Rosalyn Ashby and Peter Lee (Foster, 1999; Ashby & Lee, 1987; see also Sansom, 1987, tables 1–7). According to them and many other researchers of empathy, historical empathy does not develop automatically with age but the development towards the highest form of empathy, contextual historical empathy, requires systematic training (Ashby & Lee, 1987). The aim of this article is to discuss whether Ashby and Lee’s discovery concerning the various levels of understanding of empathy is evident in Finnish class teacher students.

In Finland, empathy has been an integral part of history teaching in comprehensive schools since the early-2000s. The common objective of comprehensive school lower stage grades 1–6 is that “the pupils will know how to place themselves in the position of a person from the past: they will know how to explain why people of different eras thought and acted in different ways.” The objectives for grades 7–9 speak of how “the pupils will learn to explain the purposes and effects of human activity.” (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004.)

In order to achieve these objectives, teachers should be well-versed in teaching historical empathy. In Finland, history for grades 7–9 (13–15-year-olds) is taught by teachers who have studied history as a major subject at university. It could well be expected that their historical empathy would be at a higher level than that of class teachers teaching grades 1–6 (7–12-year-olds), who have only studied the didactics of history for only 80 hours at a minimum during their teacher training. However, future teachers have studied history at comprehensive school and upper secondary school, so it could be assumed that they have achieved the objectives set for teaching history. In addition, Finnish class teacher students are extremely motivated and have been very successful in their previous studies. Less than one tenth of young people applying for class teacher education are accepted, while on average one fifth of applicants to Finnish universities are admitted. The majority of applicants admitted to teacher training have completed their upper secondary school studies with excellent grades and have a very good grade also in history. But do they understand the historical empathy that has only lately gained momentum as an objective in history teaching?

Class teacher students have not necessarily been trained in historical empathy during their school studies because the concept was not placed at the core of history teaching until the 2000s. Thus, one could assume that very few of the class teacher

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<sup>7</sup> With regard to historical understanding, it is said: “Comprehending historical narratives requires, also, that students develop historical perspectives, the ability to describe the past in its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there. By studying the literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, and artifacts of past peoples, students should learn to avoid ‘present-mindedness’ by not judging the past solely in terms of the norms and values of today but taking into account the historical context in which the events unfolded.” National Center for History in the Schools, The National Standards for History.

students have received systematic training in historical empathy during their school years. Consequently, the article sets out to discover:

- 1) Are the class teacher students capable of keeping their current knowledge and attitudes separate from historical knowledge and attitudes while identifying with historical actors?
- 2) Are they capable of placing themselves in the shoes people from the past and make decisions which these people could have made in the historical context in question?

In order to get answers to these questions, class teacher students participated in a simulation which was used to study their sense of historical empathy.

## **Simulation used in the study**

Simulations have been used in the education of peace. One example is the world simulation developed by the American *World Game Institute* in the 1970s (History of the Global Simulation Workshop). They have also been used for discussing complex themes of international politics and the recent past, such as the war crimes in Bosnia or the trial of Saddam Hussein (Jefferson, 1999; Ambrosio, 2006). One benefit offered by simulations has been the fact that they activate the players – during simulations pupils participate actively instead of being passive recipients (McKeachie, 1994, p. 163; Dekkers & Donatti, 1981).

Simulations have been increasingly used in history teaching since the 1970s. In their book *Games and Simulations in History* (1975) David Birt and John Nichol highlighted the positive effect simulations have in developing empathy (Birt & Nichol, 1975, p. 6). Consequently, different role-playing games and simulations have been utilised in attempting to teach historical empathy. During the great British history debate, the New Right attacked history teaching geared towards skills by labelling the use of role-playing games and simulations as bad teaching. According to the critique, while engaging in the games the pupils can freely imagine themselves as actors in history without an adequate historical context which would mean that the view of history as evidence-based discipline was at risk of extinction. (Harris & Foreman-Peck, 2004, p. 98.) The younger the pupil, the thinner his/her knowledge of history is. In the school context, the challenge is the sufficient contextualisation of the simulations. On the other hand, with regard to university students – as in the present study – one could assume that they would possess sufficient knowledge of history.

William Stover has studied students' views with a simulation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In his study, the students assumed the roles of the superpower leaders in an online simulation. The simulation participants were given tasks before and after the simulation: they had to use adjectives to describe their views on the Cold War and write about how it would have felt to have lived during the Cold War. As a result of the study, Stover highlights the change that occurred between students who participated in the simulation. Participation in the simulation helped players change their views on the Cold War and see it as much more threatening than their preconceived ideas had been. (Stover, 2007, pp. 117–118.) Even though Stover's

study touched on historical empathy, its understanding was not measured as such. The focus of the present study is on historical empathy and, in particular, in its highest form, contextual historical empathy.

The Cuban Missile Crisis simulation used in this study is based on the simulation by Chris Jordan and Tim Wood (Jordan & Wood, 1989; Rantala, 1994). It contains five decision-making rounds during which the players try achieve their goals. According to Carolyn Shaw, simulations help students develop negotiation skills and teach them how make compromises (Shaw, 2006, p. 63). These are exactly the skills that were required in the simulation used in the present study.

The research material was collected during game performances. The players marked their solutions concerning a decision-making simulation onto a form, which the researcher then collected for analysis after the game events. As the researcher also functioned as the gamemaster, he had the opportunity to observe the activities of the gaming groups and register the discussions that they had. The material thus consists of the decisions made by the players and the observations of the researcher, how the players have chosen their certain individual solutions.

With initial preparations the Cuban Missile Crisis simulation takes about 90 minutes. The players place themselves in the positions of the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union and attempt to assume the objectives given by the gamemaster. Each country has two objectives. The common objective is to avoid a nuclear war. In addition, both countries aim to gain headway in power politics in relation to their opponent. The players are unaware of each other's objectives. The simulation uses a game board on which all possible decisions by the player have been marked (Appendices 1 and 2). The players react to each other's decisions. At the beginning of each round, the gamemaster reads a news bulletin to the players and which reports changes in the political environment around the world. After this, both teams are given background materials explaining the background and possible consequences of possible solutions. The players may freely negotiate with their opponents. When the teams have made their decision in each round, the gamemaster awards points to them according to a separate scoring table. Aggressive measures offer more points than actions towards détente. If the combined points total of the teams exceeds a certain limit, of which the players have been notified beforehand, a nuclear war breaks out and both teams lose. However, the attainment of one's own objectives requires a certain type of risk-taking, which is awarded handsomely in points. This makes the players monitor the solutions of the team and increases their willingness to negotiate with their opponents.

During 2006–2010, a total of 360 students participated in the simulation used in the study. The simulations were implemented as a part of the *Didactics of History* course for class teacher students at the University of Helsinki. On average, 20 students participated in the game during 18 separate gaming events. The research data comprises 128 game performances out of which 64 represent the game of the US team and 64 of the Soviet team.

In the simulation, the students were divided into groups of six. Half of the players represented the leaders of the United States and half the leaders of the Soviet Union.

The game groups were placed opposite each other in such a way that they could not hear each other's discussions. However, they had the opportunity to negotiate with their opponents and make agreements on the progress of the game.

According to feedback collected after the game, the teacher students felt the simulation was easy and inspiring to play. However, they had problems achieving the goals set for their countries. They felt that trying to slacken a critical situation in world politics while trying to achieve the goals given to them was especially challenging.

### **The difficulty of assuming the role of superpower leaders**

While there have been a variety of definitions of empathy, its assessment has also raised a great deal of debate. When the *Schools Council Project* placed empathy at the core of teaching thirty years ago, Tony Boddington highlighted the difficulties inherent in the assessment of empathy (Boddington, 1980). After this, several different empathy models were developed in order to assess the understanding of empathy. Maybe the most well-known classification is the five levels of empathy model by Rosalyn Ashby and Peter Lee.<sup>8</sup> In the model, the most developed level is contextual historical empathy, in which pupils link the situation being studied into larger contexts and study it in relation to its historical background. A pupil possessing the ability for contextual historical empathy is capable of distinguishing what a person living the past could have known about what is now known. According to Ashby and Lee, the most developed level of empathy has, above all, to do with using a suitable strategy – the pupils must understand what needs to be done in order to understand the action of people in the past: they must be able to distinguish between the positions of historical actors and historians and various perspectives as well as past and current beliefs, values, goals and manners.

Ashby and Lee's empathy model has been created for the assessment of the historical empathy of pupils but it is suited also for the assessment of young adults, in particular with regard to the level of contextual historical empathy. During the research, it would have been possible to examine how Finnish class teacher students fit the model at different levels. If the teaching of empathy is set as an objective of history teaching, as it has been in Finland and many other countries, teachers should be able to understand empathy at the highest level. Therefore, it was not seen to be necessary to perform a finer level empathy definition in the present study. What follows is a discussion of how capable Finnish class teacher students are in reaching the level of contextual historical empathy.

The aim of the simulation used in the study was not to make the players repeat the historical sequence of events but to make them assume the objectives of the Cold War

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<sup>8</sup> The levels in question are from the least developed to the most developed: 1) experiencing the past as bleak and incomprehensible (The 'Divi' Past), 2) Generalized Stereotypes, 3) Everyday Empathy, 4) Restricted Historical Empathy, and 5) Contextual Historical Empathy. Ashby & Lee, 1987, pp. 68–85.

era superpower leaders.<sup>9</sup> The players had studied the events of the Cold War twice during their schooling, so it could be assumed that they had understood the tensions of power politics. The simulation focused on whether the players could follow the aggressive Cold War era objectives set for them.

The players' ability to engage in the Cold War power political game of benefit, which aimed at consolidating the position of the players' own country and weakening that of the opposition, demonstrated the players' sense of historical empathy. The players who assumed the role of superpower leaders were also ready for compromises if the situation was at risk of becoming too dangerous. On the other hand, the players who had not assumed a level of contextual historical empathy exhibited during the game their modern attitudes or pushed inflexibly the policies of their country without consideration of the actions of the opposition.

It is impossible to discuss the solutions and game strategies of the players in the space of one article. However, at a general level it can be noted how contextual historical empathy was evident or was not evident in the solutions of the students. In 64 games, a nuclear war broke out only six times, which indicates that the teacher students were quite ready to compromise. The majority of the players understood the tension prevalent in world politics and that the opposition would be forced into aggressive measures if it was put in a situation in which it was impossible to retreat without losing face. However, there were also players in the games who launched aggressive measures; for example, bombing Cuba when the situation had not yet even developed into a crisis. This demonstrated deficiencies in historical empathy.

Likewise, players who gave in too easily did not achieve a level of contextual historical empathy. For example, some players in the role of the leaders of the United States were willing to do anything to get the missiles out of Cuba. They promised to remove their own missiles from Turkey and allowed the strategic bombers to remain in Cuba. These players tried to avoid a nuclear war but neglected their other objective, that is, to derive benefit for their own country from the crisis. They could not walk the power political tightrope of the Cold War era. In the background, one can see a personal peace-loving thinking guiding their solutions.

Similar pacifistic attitudes can be interpreted as having been manifested in the actions of the players who from the very beginning started down the road of concession and conciliation policy. For example, some of the players in the role of the US leaders welcomed Fidel Castro to the United States (46/64)<sup>10</sup> and offered to buy sugar harvest from Cuba (22/64) during the first round of play. In the next round, they admitted to having been behind the Bay of Pigs invasion and publicly apologised for it (32/64). In addition, they agreed to enter into a trade agreement with Cuba (22/64). It has been interpreted that players who chose solutions in line with concession and conciliation policy lack the ability for contextual historical empathy. This is the case

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<sup>9</sup> In the simulation the players react to each other's decisions, so historically authentic solutions are often not even possible.

<sup>10</sup> The numbers in brackets tell how many teams of the total teams playing the country in question chose the solution in question. The solutions of player groups are presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

especially with regard to the first two rounds of play. As the situation came to a head, some of the players in the roles of the US leaders adopted the hard and fast attitude to negotiations typical of the Cold War era. However, this was partly due to the steering effect that since the third round of play the intentions of the Soviet Union became increasingly clear to the opposing players. The decisions made during the first two rounds of the game showed that almost one in every two US player groups were incapable of putting themselves in the place of the Cold War superpower leaders.

From the beginning of the game, it was easier for the players identifying with the actions of the Soviet leaders to assume the race juxtaposition. Their background material highlighted that the Soviet Union was in an inferior position compared to the United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis offered them an opportunity to catch up with the United States. The ability for historical empathy of the players assuming the role of Soviet leaders was not so much on the basis of excessive pacifism but the practice of overly aggressive politics.<sup>11</sup> Some of the players also tried to benefit from the crisis by any means and were not willing to make any compromises. In the games that led to nuclear war, it was the students in the roles of the Soviet leaders who were most often responsible for the escalation of the crisis into a full-blown war. Approximately one in six Soviet groups can be judged to have acted without adequate understanding of the balance of terror prevalent during the Cold War. The players exhibiting contextual historical empathy experimented with hard line solutions but were ready to back down if the countermeasures of the US players proved too aggravating to the situation.<sup>12</sup>

The assessment of historical empathy on the basis of just one game is, of course, only indicative. However, it is noteworthy that the combined results of the US and Soviet groups showed that one in three player groups manifested deficient historical empathy, especially since the player groups had on average three players and decisions made by the groups were consensus-based. The decisions were made as a result of discussion, so it is not likely that they were made on spur of the moment.

## **Elusiveness of contextual historical empathy**

Teaching empathy has proved challenging. Young people's limited experience of life has made it difficult for them to put themselves in the position of people from bygone eras. Teaching empathy has also been criticised for tempting young people into using their imagination and inventing stories, in which case there is a risk of history turning into storytelling. (Low-Beer, 1989; Harris & Foreman-Peck, 2004, pp. 104–105.) In the opinion of Richard Harris and Lorraine Foreman-Peck, critics start from the assumption that young people have not been properly taught historical empathy. However, Harris and Foreman-Peck argue that, especially with the help of

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<sup>11</sup> This is evident in the game template provided in the Appendix 2, for example, in solution 5b, that is ordering the Soviet vessels to continue to Cuba regardless of the sea blockade by the USA (11/64).

<sup>12</sup> Solutions like these included, for example, 5d (35/64) and 5h (28/64).



role-playing games, young people can learn to step into the shoes of people from the past and understand their actions (Harris & Foreman-Peck, 2004, p. 104). In role-playing games, as in simulation, the participant still has to be able to assume certain rules of play and a historical context.

As it stands, understanding the thinking of people from a bygone era has proved difficult, especially for younger children (Harris & Foreman-Peck, 2004, p. 105). However, it could be assumed that future class teachers studying at university would have a certain degree of experience of assuming various roles if only due to the TV programmes and films they have seen.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, they have studied Cold War history twice, at secondary and upper secondary school, so the context and the motives of the actors should be familiar to them.

As stated previously, the Finnish class teacher students have completed their history studies with excellent grades. Therefore, it could be assumed that their knowledge of the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis would be sufficient. According to prior research, the familiarity of the subject makes it easier to attain a higher level of processing (Ashby & Lee, 1987, p. 67 and reference 9), so in this respect the research group can be said to have possessed sufficient abilities for contextual historical empathy.

Rosalyn Ashby and Peter Lee have defined contextual historical empathy as the highest level of their empathy model. At this level, individuals are capable of appreciating the issue at hand in its larger contexts: they know how to distinguish between the positions and perspectives of a historian and a historical actor and what the actor in history knew as well as what we know.<sup>14</sup> However, the historical empathy of all teacher students did not reach this level. Some of the problems encountered by Deborah Cunningham in her study became apparent during the exercise: 1) the students could not step outside their own values and experience during the exercise, 2) at times, the students were more interested in their current emotions than the experiences of historical decision-makers, and 3) the students took the stance of judges of history, which turned their empathy into moralism (Cunningham, 2004, pp. 24–29). The aforementioned issues became evident when observing the discussion between students playing the simulation. At times, one could hear very clearly the current peace education discourse in them. In the background there could have been students' fear of being labelled by others as proponents of overly aggressive policies. One could also hear evaluation of the historical parties to the conflict in light of the negative labels adhered to the current United States or Russia.

Even though the attitudes described above were evident only in every third player group, this is a cause for concern. Many of the students participating in the simulation will not have studied more history after the *Didactics of History* course in question.

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<sup>13</sup> In the discussion after the simulation many players said that they had seen TV programmes and films depicting the Cuban Crisis, such as the film *Thirteen Days* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteen\\_Days\\_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteen_Days_(film))).

<sup>14</sup> Ashby & Lee, 1987, pp. 81–82; Wineberg and Fournier (1994) talk about a corresponding issue under the concept of contextualised thinking.

One could generalise that the current study suggests that not all class teachers have reached the level of contextual historical empathy. Therefore, it is questionable that the objectives set for teaching history at grades 1–6 can be achieved.

The pioneers of teaching historical empathy, Rosalyn Ashby and Peter Lee, emphasise the importance of peer group interaction in studying historical empathy. When providing grounds for their views to others and discussing the thoughts presented by them, pupils learn more about historical empathy than when contemplating it by themselves (Ashby & Lee 1987, p.85-86). However, have enough opportunities and enough time been given to internal discussions of peer groups in history teaching? As shown previously, the training of historical empathy requires sufficient competence in the context before identification exercises. Teachers often rush from one subject to another without giving pupils the chance to deepen their knowledge with the help of the peer group or without giving them a chance to see the past from the perspective of the people of the time. The reason for this may be a crammed curriculum but also the thinness of the tradition of teaching empathy in our school system.

In Finland, the study materials have focused on teaching emphasising contents and skills-oriented study materials have not been readily available. For example, only a few simulations aimed at teaching have been published in Finnish. One must agree with the view presented ten years ago by O. L. Davis Jr. according to which neither the teachers nor the textbooks are ready to emphasise empathy in teaching (Davis Jr, 2001, p.2). Davis Jr. emphasises the significance of courses on didactics of history during teacher training in giving the teaching of historical empathy the place it deserves (Davis Jr, 2001, p.10). Fortunately, in Finland we have already taken great strides along that road. The curriculum objectives, likewise, support the teaching of historical empathy. However, the planners of the future curricula should have the courage to prune back further on the amount content to be taught so that teachers might have more time to concentrate on the teaching of historical thinking – including historical empathy.

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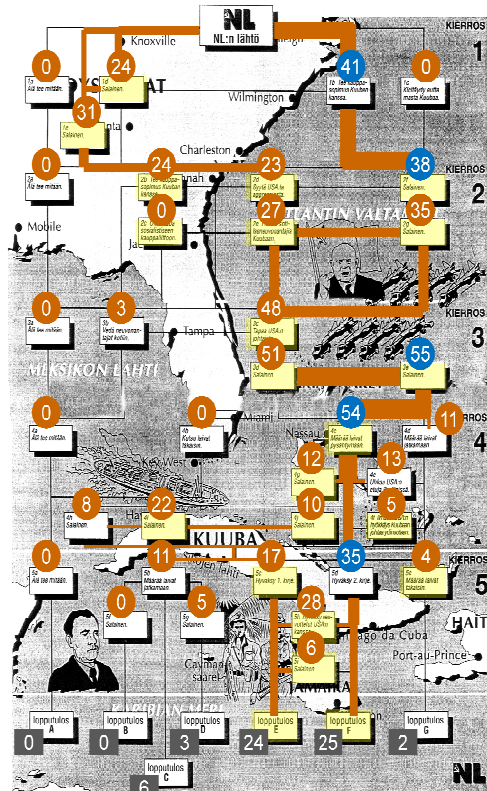
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# ASSESSING HISTORICAL EMPATHY THROUGH SIMULATION – HOW DO FINNISH TEACHER STUDENTS ACHIEVE CONTEXTUAL HISTORICAL EMPATHY?.

Jukka Rantala

## Appendix 2 USSR flowchart



### Explanations of the colored markings

Yellow boxes stands for actions taken historically.  
 White numbers within red circles stands for the number of teams taken that action.  
 White numbers within blue circles stand for top-rated action taken each round.  
 White numbers within gray squares stands for the number of teams came into that outcome.

### Actions available

#### Round 1

- 1a Do nothing
- 1b Trade agreement with Cuba
- 1c Refuse to help
- 1d Begin military discussions with Castro
- 1e Send Soviet advisers to Cuba

#### Round 2

- 2a Do nothing
- 2b Make a trade agreement with Cuba
- 2c Make Cuba a member of Comecon
- 2d Accuse USA of aggression
- 2e Send military advisers to Cuba
- 2f Supply Cuba with surface to air missiles for anti-aircraft defense
- 2g Offer to supply missiles to Cuba

#### Round 3

- 3a Do nothing
- 3b Withdraw advisers
- 3c Meet with US government

- 4f Announce US attack on Cuba will lead to USSR nuclear strike
- 4g Send missile-launching submarines to the area
- 4h Place all Soviet forces on full nuclear alert
- 4i Send a letter(Letter 1) to the US Government in which you offer to remove missile sites and not deliver the missiles to Cuba if the USA agrees not to invade Cuba and removes the naval blockade
- 4j Send a letter (Letter 2) to the US Government in which you offer to remove missile sites and not deliver the missiles to Cuba if the USA agrees to remove US missiles which are placed in Turkey

#### Round 5

- 5a Do nothing
- 5b Order ships to continue to Cuba
- 5c Agree to stand by Letter 1
- 5d Agree to stand by Letter 2
- 5e Order ships to return to USSR
- 5f Launch a full scale nuclear attack on the USA
- 5g Place all Soviet forces on full nuclear alert
- 5h Agree to meet the USA in discussions to solve crisis
- 5i Order all ships carrying missiles to return to the USSR

### Outcomes

- A Failed to achieve one of the aims
- B A disaster for you and the whole world
- C A very dangerous course of action which will probably lead to nuclear war
- D A very dangerous course of action which will



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3d Offer to supply missiles to Cuba

3e Arrange for ships in the USSR to be loaded with cargoes of missiles and sail for Cuba

Round 4

4a Do nothing

4b Order ships to turn back

4c Order ships to stop

4d Order ships to continue

4e Threaten US interests in Berlin

probably lead to nuclear war

E Sensible compromises which reduce the risk of nuclear war and offer the chance to gain something from the crisis

F Sensible compromises which reduce the risk of nuclear war and offer the chance to gain something from the crisis

G A series of actions which may turn out to be a bit of a gamble for you leading either to problems or to advantages